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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the situation of Palestinian women between October 2006 and September 2007, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2007/7. It reviews the situation of Palestinian women and provides an overview of the assistance provided by entities of the United Nations system, inter alia, with regard to humanitarian assistance, economic activities, education and training, health and the human rights of women. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2007/7 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council, concerned about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation, to assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those laid out in the previous report of the Secretary-General on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2007/4) and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-second session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period from October 2006 to September 2007, and reviews the situation of Palestinian women based on information from United Nations bodies or individuals that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such bodies and individuals include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967.

3. The report also reflects information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women, including the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Bank.

4. The social and economic situation of Palestinian women from 2000-2006 was highlighted in a report commissioned by the ESCWA Centre for Women (E/ESCWA/ECW/2007/Technical Paper.1), which was distributed to countries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women. ESCWA also prepared the report entitled "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people, including Palestinian women, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan", contained in the note by the Secretary-General (A/62/75-E/2007/13.

5. The present report provides recommendations on improving the situation of Palestinian women, including through the continued assistance of the United Nations system.

II. Situation of Palestinian women

6. During the period under review, the crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory deepened and continued to claim lives (A/62/82-E/2007/66, para. 77). The Israeli-Hizbullah conflict in Lebanon and its political fallout brought to a halt any Israeli attempts to implement a unilateral withdrawal from parts of the West Bank (ibid., para. 9). Settlement activity and construction of the barrier continued in the West Bank, as did Israeli incursions into population centres. Efforts to bring political progress through dialogue between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have continued, under the auspices of the United States Secretary of State.

7. In addition, an intense round of intra-Palestinian violence in Gaza in December 2006 and January 2007 threatened to degenerate into civil war (ibid., para. 8). An agreement, reached on 8 February 2007 to end the factional violence, and the subsequent formation of the Palestinian Government of National Unity, calmed the situation, though clan feuds continued in Gaza where law and order are yet to be fully restored and the firing of rockets into Israel is yet to be halted (ibid.). The Government of National Unity came to an end in June 2007, when President Abbas dismissed Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh and appointed a Government led by Salam Fayyad, which committed to the Quartet principles. With the formation of the Government, the European Union and the United States announced their intention to renew direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority.[1] The United Nations strongly advocated for all parties to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law regarding the use of force and the protection of civilians. Through the Quartet and other channels, the United Nations worked to facilitate the release of Palestinian customs and tax revenues through agreed mechanisms, and encouraged the international community to continue to assist Palestinians in need (A/62/82-E/2007/66, para. 10).

8. The conflict continued to have a serious detrimental effect on all Palestinian people. According to the report of the Director-General of the International Labour Organization on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, living standards declined; poverty and unemployment increased; and social disintegration and political disarray intensified.[2] The report also indicated that the financial embargo imposed by the international community on the Palestinian Authority, the withholding of Palestinian revenues by Israel, the suspension by Western donors of their direct budget support, and the restrictions on mobility have led to the further deterioration of the situation as compared with the previous year.[3]

9. The ongoing conflict has resulted in a near collapse of the Palestinian economy, soaring unemployment and a sharp increase in poverty.[4] The World Bank

[1] Department of Public Information, News and Media Division, Press release of 5701st meeting (AM) of the Security Council, 20 June 2007 (SC/9053).

[2] ILO (2007). Report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, para. 7.

[3] Ibid.

[4] World Bank, Country Brief: Middle East and North Africa Region, West Bank and Gaza (September 2007).

reported that during the last two years, the collapse has accelerated, with gross domestic product contracting by nearly 9 per cent in 2006 and by 4.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2007. The long-standing fiscal crisis deepened further in 2006 as a result of Israel's withholding of Palestinian clearance revenues and the aid boycott, resulting in a deficit of over 1 billion United States dollars ($).[4]

10. Poverty and unemployment reached very high levels, with close to 66 per cent of all households in the Occupied Palestinian Territory living below the national poverty line and 24 per cent of the labour force unemployed.[5] The situation was particularly severe in Gaza, where 80 per cent of the population relied on United Nations food aid and 88 per cent lived below the official poverty line of $2.20 per day (ibid., para. 15). There are substantial gender differences in the labour market, and military occupation has tended to reinforce discrimination both directly and indirectly.[6] According to ILO calculations based on the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2006 only 14.7 per cent of women were in employment, compared to 52.0 per cent of men. Most women were engaged in housekeeping (54.1 per cent) or studying (21.1 per cent).[7]

11. While 6 out of 10 young women in the 15 to 24 age group were engaged in studies, the investment was lost to Palestinian society as very few Palestinian women were in employment.[8] Only 4.5 per cent of young women were in employment in 2006, compared to 28.6 per cent of young men. Nearly one in three young women was engaged in housekeeping.[7]

12. The lives of Palestinian women continued to be at great risk as evidenced by the increasing number of women killed or injured.[9] Between 1 September 2006 and 31 August 2007, a total of 67 Palestinian women were killed as a result of the direct conflict or internal violence and 120 were injured throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. During the same period, direct conflict resulted in the killing of 2 Israeli women and the injury of 12 others.[9] As of June 2007, 118 Palestinian women, including minors, pregnant women and mothers, remained in Israeli prisons, detention facilities and camps.[10]

13. The right to freedom of movement has continued to be obstructed by more than 500 checkpoints, roadblocks, earth mounds and other types of obstacles. Movement is also curtailed by the permit system and the barrier (A/62/360, para. 24). During the period under review there has been a 43 per cent increase in the number of checkpoints and obstacles to movement in the West Bank (ibid., para. 38). Primarily owing to closures, delays at checkpoints and the barrier, close to 30 per cent of pregnant women in the West Bank had difficulties accessing antenatal care and safe delivery.[11] Both primary and secondary services have declined, especially as the large majority of delivery and newborn care services (80 per cent of the deliveries in six Health Ministry hospitals in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) are unable to perform regular maintenance. Pregnant women with post-natal

[5] ILO, op. cit., para. 12.
[6] ILO, op. cit., para 87.
[7] ILO, op. cit., table 3.3.
[8] ILO, op. cit., para. 88.
[9] Contribution of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to the report (2007).
[10] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/62/35), para. 20.
[11] Ibid., para. 31.

complications may also be at greater risk when discharged too early from the hospital owing to lack of staff and space. Emergency obstetrics has become a priority (see A/62/75-E/2007/13, para. 49).

14. According to UNFPA, the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health reported that since 2000, at least 68 pregnant Palestinian women gave birth at Israeli checkpoints. Additionally, 10 per cent of pregnant women spent two to four hours on the road before reaching a medical centre or a hospital, while 6 per cent spent more than four hours, when the normal travelling time before the intifada was 15 to 30 minutes. This hardship is estimated to have contributed to an 8.2 per cent increase in the number of home deliveries.[12] According to Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health statistics for 2006, there were an estimated 117,000 pregnant women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including some 18,000 who suffered from difficult pregnancy and birth owing to a lack of appropriate and timely antenatal, delivery and post-natal care. In fact, inadequate medical care during pregnancy was the third cause of mortality among Palestinian women of reproductive age, according to the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health (see A/HRC/4/57, para. 12).

15. Owing to the closures and the barrier, many families are reluctant to let their daughters endure the degrading experience of waiting at checkpoints or barrier crossing points, to be searched or subjected to harassment by Israeli soldiers, or to have to walk long distances to avoid such experiences. Families are much more likely to pressure young women to drop out of school and not pursue higher levels of education (A/62/75-E/2007/13, para. 65).

16. The Special Committee noted that the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had not improved during the reporting period, and particularly in the Gaza Strip, it had deteriorated significantly (A/62/360, para. 23). It was reported to the Special Committee that one pregnant prisoner was made to sit handcuffed on a small chair, was blindfolded and hit on the face. Some female prisoners had given birth in prison while tied to their beds. The Special Committee was also told that one of the ways to force suspects to surrender to Israel forces was to threaten their spouses and sisters with rape (ibid., para. 64). According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the intensity of Israeli actions in the month of May in the Gaza Strip had dramatically affected the already undermined physical and psychological security of women and severely reduced their enjoyment of basic human rights. In the central Gaza Strip, women were forced to cease all activities at a centre for women during the month of May owing to the threat of shelling in the area, as well as inter-factional violence. The increased level of violence among Palestinian factions had been an aggravating factor, contributing to the further collapse of women's protection.[13]

17. A 2005/2006 survey, published in 2007, carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics found that violence against women, especially domestic violence, was one of the problems faced by households in the Western and Arab societies. Approximately two thirds of ever-married women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory stated that they had been subjected to psychological violence

[12] UNFPA news feature, "Checkpoints compound the risks of childbirth for Palestinian women" (15 May 2007), available from http://www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=972.

[13] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *The Humanitarian Monitor: Occupied Palestinian Territory*, No. 13 (May 2007), p. 7.

and almost one quarter had been subjected to physical violence from their husband. Among unmarried women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, more than one half stated that they had been subjected to psychological violence and a quarter of them to physical violence.[14] The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported an increase in the number of deaths for so-called immoral behaviour, including honour killings by families. In 2007 there were 11 cases of honour killings of women reported in the Gaza Strip.[15]

18. The right to education in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continued to be seriously affected by the occupation. UNRWA reported that the dropout rate was very high, graduation rates were low and female education was generally on the decline. It attributed the collapse of Gaza's education system and education standards to the cumulative effects of the occupation, closures, poverty and violence (A/62/360, para. 58). According to UNICEF, primary school enrolment rates for girls fell from a peak of 98 per cent in 2000/2001 to 92.1 per cent in 2005/2006. For boys, the decline was from 95.8 per cent to 90.5 per cent. A huge gap exists between the proportion of girls completing primary school (94.5 per cent) and those enrolling in secondary school (76.4 per cent).[16] Attendance at rural girls' schools declines even further at each education level (A/62/75-E/2007/13, para. 66).

19. UNICEF indicated that young Palestinian girls had few opportunities for development, recreation and participation, and that there were few safe spaces for young girls to congregate. Most of the 300 youth clubs across the Occupied Palestinian Territory lacked funding and were poorly managed and equipped.[17] Furthermore, UNICEF noted that the adolescence of many young women has been compromised by household demands, or pressures to marry early as the median age at first marriages for women was 18 years.[16]

20. Food insecurity disproportionately affects women and children. A study conducted by UNRWA in September 2006 revealed that 57.5 per cent of children from 6 to 36 months and 44.9 per cent of pregnant women in the Gaza Strip were anaemic.[18] Of children under 5 years of age, 22 per cent were vitamin A-deficient; 20 per cent showed signs of iodine deficiency (32 per cent in the West Bank and 3 per cent in the Gaza Strip); and 4.1 per cent in the Gaza Strip suffered from clinical vitamin D-deficiency (rickets). The increased incidence of non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases and cancer, represents an epidemiological shift that imposes additional burdens on the scarce human and financial resources (A/62/75-E/2007/13, para. 51). The 60th World Health Assembly expressed concern about the health crisis and rising levels of food insecurity and demanded improvement in the living and medical conditions of Palestinian detainees, including of women and children.[19]

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[14] Palestinian National Authority, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Violence against women in Palestinian society (Domestic Violence Survey 2005/2006).

[15] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *OCHA Special Focus: Israeli-Palestinian Fatalities Since 2000 — Key Trends* (August 2007), p. 5.

[16] UNICEF contribution to the report (2007).

[17] *UNICEF Humanitarian Action Report 2007* (29 January 2007), excerpts.

[18] UNRWA contribution to the report (2006).

[19] Resolution WHA.60.2 entitled "Health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan.

21. Women continued to outlive men. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2006 the life expectancy for men was 71.7 years compared to 73.2 years for women. In the West Bank, life expectancy was reported as 71.9 years for men and 73.6 years for women, and 71.4 years for men and 72.5 for women in the Gaza Strip.[20]

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

22. The present section focuses on the assistance provided to Palestinian women by entities of the United Nations system. Nine areas of support have been identified: education and training; information and communications technology; health; employment and entrepreneurship; women's human rights; violence against women; humanitarian assistance; advocacy and information; and gender mainstreaming.

A. Education and training

23. Several United Nations entities focused on initiatives to improve the access of women and girls to education and training opportunities. During the 2006/2007 academic year, approximately 500,000 students, half of them girls, were enrolled in UNRWA elementary, preparatory and secondary schools. Young women constituted 75 per cent of the beneficiaries of small scholarship projects undertaken by UNRWA.

24. Efforts were made to enhance access to education, including through construction and/or rehabilitation of community buildings for schools, school feeding projects and provision of school supplies. Within the framework of the Integrated Community Development Project ($15 million), the World Bank supported schools for girls, construction/rehabilitation of community buildings, and rehabilitation of kindergartens. UNIFEM partnered with WFP in a pilot phase of a West Bank school feeding project to provide over 13,000 schoolchildren with healthy midday snacks, which were produced in centres employing over 225 disadvantaged women. Approximately 100,000 schoolchildren in severely affected areas, half of them girls, were provided with school bags and stationery by UNICEF.

25. To enhance the quality of education, training was provided for 75 principals of girls' schools, 150 female school teachers, 2,000 newly appointed teachers and 120 new supervisors. Some 190 librarians in the West Bank were also supported.

26. An initiative was undertaken to empower girls through educational television programmes. The UNESCO Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity and the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation are developing a public-private partnership with Sesame Workshop, the non-profit educational organization behind *Sesame Street*, to produce the latest season of *Shara'a Simsim*, the Palestinian version of its internationally renowned educational television series. The season 2007-2008 focuses on promoting girls' education and gender equality.

27. To increase access to alternative spaces for learning and recreation, including those in rural areas, UNICEF supported learning centres. In 2007, some 68,200

[20] Palestinian National Authority, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Demographic and Socioeconomic Status of the Palestinian People at the end of 2006 (December 2006).

adolescents, 51 per cent of them girls, participated in learning and recreational activities and many thousands more used the computer, library, sports and music facilities. The learning centres enabled adolescent girls, especially those living in rural areas, to participate in sports competitions for the first time.

28. Training programmes for women were provided in a wide range of areas, including leadership development, human rights and financial management. In the West Bank, Palestinian women benefited from the WFP Food-for-Work and training activities that focused on skills development, knowledge transfer and enhancement of the productive capacity of women. Women constituted 50 per cent of the village committee members involved in the selection of activities. The International Training Centre of ILO continued a project on "Social and civil dialogue for reconstruction and reconciliation" and provided training to Palestinian participants, 38 per cent of whom were female employees of governmental, employers' and workers' organizations as well as national and international organizations. ILO also organized several training workshops for women in trade unions to facilitate their participation in union activities, including election to leadership positions.

29. Activities were undertaken to enhance the capacity of women in financial management. UNIFEM provided training in management, including financial management, leadership and bookkeeping. UNDP organized trainings and workshops on finance, management and law in eight districts in the West Bank to enhance the capacities of newly elected mayors and female members of government. UNIFEM provided on-the-job training to women volunteers and administrative committee members of the Sabaya centres in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,

30. A number of training opportunities were also provided to rural women. In the rural areas of the West Bank, UNIFEM provided academic counselling for women and academic support classes for girls. Eighteen community centres established by UNDP are used as women's centres for capacity development of rural women, legal counselling and income generation. UNIFEM also supported a food security and capacity-building initiative in the Gaza Strip, benefiting 50 women in rural areas by providing them with training and start-up costs for small-scale production projects.

B. Information and communication technology

31. Efforts were made to increase women's equal access to and benefits from information and communication technologies. The UNRWA Department of Education continued to emphasize, inter alia, equal access of Palestinian refugee women to information and communications technologies, encourage gender equality in recruitment and retention policies and build capacity to produce appropriate information content. The World Bank financed the establishment of five multi-purpose community telecentres that provided safe access by women and girls to information and communications services and technologies through the use of female-friendly office hours, discount offers for female members, a comfortable visiting environment, and a regular focus on female non-formal education opportunities.

32. Through the Sabaya Programme, UNIFEM supported an electronic discussion among rural women aimed at building their capacity to use the Internet as a form of communication and expression, and as a means of collecting and processing data and information relevant to their needs. The use of information technology serves to

overcome movement restrictions imposed upon women by military occupation and by societal customs.

33. UNESCO reported that 28 female journalists and media professionals from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Palestinian Authority participated in a training workshop on the topic "Use of ICT in media for female journalists", held in Jordan in August 2007. The workshop included, inter alia, an analysis of current media vehicles for women, the way in which the media is addressing women's needs and gender equality issues.

C. Health

34. During the reporting period, United Nations entities focused on increasing women's access to reproductive health services, psychological counselling, health education and disease prevention programmes, immunizations, and provision of safe water and sanitary facilities. UNFPA provided a range of activities geared towards maintaining the integrity of the health system. Among these were: support to the delivery of reproductive health services through the procurement of reproductive health commodities and equipment for primary health centres and maternity wards; delivery of fuel for the referral system; the transfer of emergency obstetric cases and women with genital cancers; and procurement of generators for eight health centres in Gaza after the destruction of the electrical power grid in Gaza. UNRWA sought to strengthen gender-sensitive health programming by obtaining, where possible, sex-disaggregated data and encouraging gender equality in recruitment and retention policies.

35. Family planning and antenatal care was provided by a number of entities. Approximately 90,000 women received antenatal care in the five fields of UNRWA operations. More than 20,000 women sought family planning guidance for the first time and more than 110,000 women benefited from the service. About 100,000 pregnant women and nursing mothers benefited from the UNRWA food aid programme; up to 95,000 women with diabetes and/or hypertension received care in UNRWA non-communicable disease clinics; and 45,000 women were assisted with admission to hospitals. UNFPA also focused on projects that respond to the needs of youth, including young women's needs emerging from the crisis.

36. Various entities also provided psychosocial counselling to women. For example, UNFPA, in cooperation with the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, implemented a new project with an innovative approach in the field of psychosocial counselling. The UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme in the Gaza Strip provided essential psychosocial support for Palestinian refugees living in situations of protracted violence and armed conflict. UNIFEM provided psychosocial counselling through specialized lectures, group counselling sessions, one-to-one consultations and information dissemination, with over 1,000 women as direct beneficiaries. UNIFEM also set up mobile psychosocial teams that conducted group sessions, individual therapy, home-delivered psychotherapy sessions, life skills trainings and health counselling services, directly benefiting over 2,500 Palestinian women.

37. Health education and training programmes, including on HIV/AIDS, were provided. UNIFEM conducted a specialized training for female school counsellors on sexuality, health and sexual violence with a focus on, inter alia, girls' education,

including awareness-raising sessions on sexual violence. Sexual health education sessions for university students and youth, aimed at raising their awareness of HIV/AIDS and the vulnerability of women, were also supported. Health education programmes on the prevention of tobacco use, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases were promoted by UNRWA.

38. Another important area of support from United Nations entities was vaccination programmes. UNRWA continued to offer women and children full immunization coverage against vaccine-preventable diseases. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health in Gaza in producing vaccination record cards for approximately 140,000 infants and pregnant women, procuring emergency primary health-care kits, including obstetrics, midwifery, first aid, and baby and family hygiene kits. UNICEF also provided tetanus vaccines for 75,000 women of reproductive age, and promoted breastfeeding and appropriate child feeding practices.

39. Taking into account that women and girls have the major responsibility for collecting water for household use and often lack decent sanitation facilities, UNICEF focused on extending access to safe water and decent sanitation facilities in order to improve the situation of women and girls, including at school. UNICEF provided daily drinking water to 343 schools and 32 health facilities across Gaza, and is constructing or rehabilitating sanitation facilities at 52 schools and 8 clinics. In addition to constructing wells and water networks, UNICEF distributed 450 water tanks to rural families, and 6 mobile water tanks to Gaza municipalities.

D. Employment and entrepreneurship

40. Entities initiated or continued training for job placement, created employment opportunities and supported projects aimed at income generation and entrepreneurship. Joint initiatives, including research projects, were also undertaken by United Nations entities. ILO supported the project "Job placement for graduates of vocational programmes", which aims to stimulate employment and income generation opportunities for 140 unemployed new graduates from Palestinian industrial/vocational schools and Ministry of Labour vocational training centres. The participation of women was 26 per cent in Gaza and 38 per cent in the West Bank, and 55 per cent of the total trainees received permanent jobs.

41. The Occupied Palestinian Territory was included in the ILO-led regional programme "Gender equality and workers' rights in the informal economies of the Arab States" (2006-2008), a joint initiative of the ILO Regional Office for the Arab States, the Centre for Arab Women Training and Research, the International Development Research Centre and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations. The two-year initiative consists of three interlinked components: research, training, and policy advocacy. During the research phase, two regional background papers on statistics and social protection and five country case studies (Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territory), were produced and discussed during a research workshop held in Tunis in April 2007. Three Palestinian researchers developed a country case study that focuses on extending social protection to workers in the informal economy from gender equality and workers' rights perspectives. Currently the project is entering the training phase, which will culminate in a regional training on social protection and

statistics in the informal economy. The third component on policy advocacy will focus on specific policy briefs and round tables addressing policymakers and think tanks.

42. The International Labour Organization committed $1 million for the establishment of the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection. The Fund serves as the institutional framework for resource mobilization and for social and economic development in three core programme areas: community infrastructure, enterprise and human resources. In August 2007, the ILO Regional Office for the Arab States fielded a multidisciplinary mission to the Occupied Palestinian Territory to formulate technical cooperation strategies aimed at poverty reduction and the promotion of decent and productive employment for Palestinians, with special emphasis on youth and women.

43. Initiatives, including joint initiatives, were undertaken with a view to building the capacity of key stakeholders in fostering women's entrepreneurship. The Empretec programme of UNCTAD and ILO aims to support the development of small and medium-size enterprises, through building institutional capacity for establishing a dynamic private sector and internationally competitive enterprises. Of the 123 trainees who graduated, 16 per cent were women, representing leading industries and services across the West Bank. A round-table meeting for the Chairmen and Senior Executives of the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and its 14 member chambers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, supported by ILO, aimed to improve the role of employers' organizations in employment creation, particularly through the promotion of small and medium enterprises, with a special focus on strengthening and empowering women's entrepreneurship.

44. As women microentrepreneurs are among the poorest members of communities, credit to these women constitutes a fundamental source of capital that enables them to meet the basic needs of their families. During the reporting period, UNRWA disbursed over 38,000 solidarity group loans, valued at over $25 million, to women microentrepreneurs in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Agency also provided over 5,500 consumer loans, worth over $3.2 million, to working-class families in the Gaza Strip with no access to bank loans. In June 2006, UNRWA had a portfolio of more than 13,600 loans in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, valued at over $9.6 million, 20 per cent of which were held by women clients.

45. With a view to enhancing the role of Palestinian women in the improvement of national food security and the agricultural industry, FAO supported the continuation of the project "Support to household food security and income generation through bio-intensive backyard agricultural production and cottage industry activities for women in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip", started in 2006. To date, some 180 women have participated in intensive training in food preservation and processing, with a focus on market orientation. Fifty women were selected for the intensive "backyard production" component that includes grey-water recycling facilities to overcome limited water supply.

46. United Nations entities reported on efforts to create work for women, including through programmes and projects at the community level. UNRWA created an estimated 1.8 million days of temporary work under its direct-hire programme and community-based infrastructure and construction projects to help

beneficiaries to maintain minimum levels of income and support their families. In the Gaza Strip and West Bank, 17 per cent of the beneficiaries were female heads of household. In 2006, UNESCO submitted to the Islamic Development Bank, a $2.8 million programme focused on generating job opportunities for young women and men, through revitalizing cultural heritage sites of old cities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Through various programmes and projects implemented during the reporting period, UNIFEM created employment opportunities for over 300 women, mostly from rural areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

47. The importance of including women in economic decision-making was highlighted by UNCTAD, which reported on the election, in 2007, of a leading Palestinian businesswoman to the Board that oversees a project entitled "Establishment of the Palestinian Shippers Council (PSC)", launched at the beginning of 2006, with the aim of protecting the interests of the Palestinian shipping community of exporters and importers. It was noted that women currently represent 40 per cent of the PSC management team.

48. In April 2007, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process led a joint United Nations system agency evaluation of socio-economic needs in the Jordan Valley, in particular those of women. Through the evaluation, priority areas of intervention were identified that would increase the economic participation of women in their communities. It is envisaged that a joint United Nations programme, coordinated by the Office, will follow towards the end of 2007.

E. Women's human rights

49. Several United Nations entities undertook initiatives focused on protecting and promoting the human rights of Palestinian women and girls, including through advocacy, training, seminars, support to the fulfilment of reporting obligations and preparation of action plans. OHCHR-Palestine, along with various representatives of Palestinian civil society, continued developing advocacy strategies to encourage the incorporation of international human rights standards into the Palestinian legislation and policy, with a special focus on women's rights. In 2007, OHCHR-Palestine conducted advocacy activities with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry for Women and Children, on the issue of justice sector reform, emphasizing the need for enhancing women's access to justice and other social support mechanisms. OHCHR-Palestine participated in seminars and discussions addressing specific issues relating to women's rights. The work of relevant United Nations human rights mechanisms and the ways in which NGOs can effectively use such mechanisms, especially Special Procedures, to advance the rights of women were highlighted.

50. During the period under review, significant support was provided to capacity-building on women's human rights. OHCHR-Palestine conducted several trainings on women's human rights. Eight training courses were organized in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for representatives of Palestinian civil society, including human rights organizations and other NGOs. Gender balance was taken into account in the selection of participants and gender perspectives were integrated in the development of the curricula, objectives and goals and monitoring and evaluation. An intensive training of trainers course for Palestinian human rights defenders and activists from human rights organizations was organized. Workshops and training courses were

also organized on women's rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, targeting representatives of Palestinian human rights organizations. In May 2007, OHCHR-Palestine conducted two courses specifically for female participants in the West Bank and Gaza City to educate women's groups on United Nations Special Procedures and the United Nations treaty bodies and submission of communications. Training on gender equality and women's human rights was delivered by UNIFEM to male and female youth members of the "Youth Rights Monitor" project's Palestinian Legislative Council Monitoring Committee and of the project's Media Committee.

51. In close cooperation with OHCHR, UNESCO actively participated in the implementation of the World Programme for Human Rights Education Plan of Action for 2005-2007 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The two entities will collaborate on the first stages of this project aimed at promoting human rights, peace, democratic citizenship, intercultural understanding and human rights education. The initial stage of the project, which analyses the current situation of human rights education in the Palestinian school system, was completed in late 2006.

52. As part of its capacity-building and awareness-raising campaign on women's human rights and violence against women in the Gaza Strip, UNIFEM provided legal counselling and legal literacy services to more than 1,500 women in marginalized areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As executing agency for the United Nations Democracy Fund "Youth Rights Monitor" project, UNIFEM has taken a gender-sensitive approach to monitoring youth rights and in advocacy through the local media.

53. OHCHR-Palestine engaged closely with Palestinian women's organizations in coordinating a unified alternative report for the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and participated in various seminars and discussions addressing specific issues related to women's rights, highlighting the work of relevant United Nations human rights mechanisms and how NGOs can effectively use such mechanisms to advance the rights of women.

F. Violence against women

54. The issue of violence against women was taken up by a range of United Nations entities, in collaboration with some Palestinian NGOs. For example, OHCHR-Palestine, UNFPA, WHO and Al-Muntada (Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations against Domestic Violence) organized a series of activities across the Occupied Palestinian Territory in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. These activities included a countrywide media campaign from 25 November to 10 December 2006. Ten workshops, facilitated by Al-Muntada, were held at various locations throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Each workshop focused on gender-based violence and the psychological and social health of women as affected by the current political, social and economic situation confronting the Palestinian society. An advocacy plan was subsequently developed for civil society organizations to ensure that the recommendations would be acted upon. OHCHR-Palestine continued to follow developments in relation to domestic violence against women, including through participation in the initial advocacy campaign launched by civil society

organizations to address the issue. The campaign concluded with the drafting of a plan of action that was formally launched by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in November 2006.

55. UNESCO produced and published a fact sheet on violence against women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which was distributed in December 2006 during the National Campaign on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

G. Humanitarian assistance

56. United Nations entities continued to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinian women living in refugee camps and disadvantaged villages. Activities included providing food, monetary assistance, creating an environment conducive for learning and providing extracurricular activities.

57. UNRWA provided special assistance to over 1 million refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, 45 per cent of whom were female heads of households. The Agency's special hardship assistance provided the poorest families with a critical safety net in the form of food support, selective cash assistance and preferential access to the Agency's vocational training centres, where pupils could learn skills to help to lift their families out of poverty.

58. UNESCO continued its participation in the project "Isolated and disenfranchised communities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory", funded by the Trust Fund for Human Security. The project aims to address the most urgent needs of Palestinian people living in 14 disadvantaged villages and 2 refugee camps, including through enhancing their learning environment and implementing extracurricular activities, promoting intangible and oral heritage, with special attention to cultural projects with potential for employment generation, and producing informative radio programmes, talk shows and documentaries.

H. Advocacy and information

59. Several United Nations entities carried out advocacy activities, including through meetings, conferences, establishment of databases and research. Entities also collected, analysed and disseminated information on the situation of Palestinian women.

60. The Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs organized seminars and conferences that included a focus on the situation of Palestinian women. For example, the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in Doha in February 2007, as one of its sub-themes, addressed the plight of the most vulnerable segments of the Palestinian society, including women. The United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, held in Brussels in August 2007, devoted one of its workshops to the topic of the empowerment of women and the role of women's organizations in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Division also held an annual consultative meeting with civil society organizations, including women representatives. Eighty women's organizations are currently accredited to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. In addition, the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the

Government of Japan and the United Nations University, organized an international media seminar entitled "Re-engaging the Israelis and the Palestinians in the search for a comprehensive and lasting political settlement", in Tokyo in June 2007.

61. Several actors were instrumental in organizing activities to mark International Women's Day in 2007. WFP, CHF International (formerly known as the Cooperative Housing Foundation), the Ministry of Agriculture in coordination with UNFPA, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights and the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme organized a commemoration of International Women's Day in Gaza in 2007. Activities focused on raising awareness on the theme "Ending impunity for violence against women". In the West Bank, WFP-Occupied Palestinian Territory, in partnership with CHF International and the local committees, organized a celebration of International Women's Day, including the opening of two exhibitions, of Food for Training products produced by women beneficiaries of the WFP Food for Training programme.

62. Research and documentation, including through databases, on the situation of Palestinian women were supported by a number of United Nations entities. Through its Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Centre, UNESCO commissioned, collected, analysed and disseminated research on gender equality and the human rights of women. The Centre developed online databases, produced publications, organized training courses and targeted seminars to ministries, NGOs, students and researchers. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs gathered information and documents on emerging gender issues through field networks and in collaboration with other humanitarian and development actors to inform its gender advocacy on women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Division for Palestinian Rights continued to update and expand the documents collection on Palestinian women in the Internet-based United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL). In addition, the UNESCO Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Centre published a documentary study entitled "Deferent roles of Palestinian women in the thirties and the forties: the political participation of Palestinian women". The two editions were launched on 12 October 2006.

63. In order to raise awareness about the situation of Palestinian women in rural areas, UNIFEM continued to support the development of a database used by the Sabaya women's centres to gather and update information on resources and services accessible to women within rural communities. During 2007, UNIFEM analysed data gathered from the 18 areas of implementation of its Sabaya Programme and developed relevant indicators on rural women. These indicators serve as a crucial tool for raising awareness about rural women's needs among decision makers and service providers.

64. Film was also used as an advocacy tool to bring attention to the situation of women in the region. UNIFEM supported the production of an advocacy short documentary film, entitled *Maria's Grotto* on the issue of femicide in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, filmed in the West Bank by the Palestinian filmmaker Buthina Khouri. The screenings of the film *Divorce — the Iranian Way*, in 18 rural communities through the Sabaya centres were also supported by UNIFEM. Over 660 women attended these film screenings and participated in the ensuing discussion sessions on women's rights.

65. The Department of Public Information reported a special information programme on the "Question of Palestine", aimed at sensitizing public opinion on this issue. The English Unit of United Nations Radio filed 10 news stories and 5 feature stories on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including on the situation of Palestinian women. The Arabic Unit of United Nations Radio covered the situation of, and assistance to, Palestinian women through news, features and in its weekly programme on women. Through a special feature page, entitled "News Focus: Middle East", the Department maintains easy access to information materials on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, including two web-only articles entitled "A difficult future for the Gaza Strip", by Jonas Hagen, dated 25 January 2007, and "Gaza border closures accompanied by fears of humanitarian crisis", by Sana Aftab Khan, dated 2 August 2007.

66. The Department of Public Information drew attention to the situation of Palestinian women through its publications, press conferences and briefings and seminars. In addition to the *UN Chronicle* magazine (issue 1, 2007), its monthly compilation entitled "Chronological review of events relating to the question of Palestine", and the bimonthly newsletter NGO Action News, the Department of Public Information also reported that the United Nations Information Service in Geneva organized three press conferences and biweekly briefings on matters pertaining to Palestinian women: the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and the visit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Occupied Palestinian Territory in November 2006.

I. Gender mainstreaming

67. A number of United Nations entities initiated activities to strengthen gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes, including at the country level. the UNDP "In-house gender mainstreaming capacity development" initiative aims to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in programmes and operational activities of the UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People. UNDP also promoted the incorporation of gender perspectives into the development strategy of a participatory rural development and planning project from its inception. FAO supported a project on "Mainstreaming gender dimensions into water resources development and management in the Mediterranean region (GEWAMED)", coordinated by the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari and financed by the European Commission. The project was designed to build a national and regional shared knowledge base on gender equality issues, policies and related actions; to enhance dialogue among the countries of the Mediterranean region; and to contribute to the adoption of national gender-oriented policies and other related instruments. FAO, IFAD and the Gender and Water Alliance are members of the Consultation and Advisory Gender Committee of the project.

68. Other entities adopted policies and employed specialists to advance gender mainstreaming. UNRWA adopted a Policy for Gender Equality to achieve gender mainstreaming in operations and service delivery. The Agency's assistance to Palestinian refugee women focuses on meeting their human development needs in the areas of education and technical training, female-focused basic health care, and the provision of microfinance.

69. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, requested the deployment of a Gender Adviser to support the work of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in preparing an analysis of the main gender inequality issues and concerns on the ground. The Gender Adviser would also identify gaps in the current programmes/activities, assess the quality and effectiveness of the existing gender equality programmes in the different sectors' humanitarian response, and identify strategies to overcome any deficiencies.

70. During 2006-2007, the ESCWA Centre for Women provided technical cooperation and advisory services to the Palestinian Ministry for Women's Affairs on gender mainstreaming and strategic planning.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

71. **During the period under review, the crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory deepened. The conflict and intra-Palestinian violence continued to have a detrimental effect on all Palestinian people. The international financial embargo, the withholding of Palestinian revenues by Israel and the suspension of direct budget support from donors have led to a further deterioration of the situation.**

72. **The situation of Palestinian women was directly affected by increased poverty and unemployment and the decline in living standards and food security. The movement of women and girls was restricted by closures, checkpoints and roadblocks, as well as the permit system, which limited their access to health-care services, employment and schools. Close to 30 per cent of pregnant women in the West Bank had difficulties accessing antenatal care and safe delivery. Both primary and secondary services have declined. Continuing declines in the education system were marked by high dropout rates, a wide gap between girls completing primary school and those enrolling in secondary school, and low graduation rates. Violence against women, especially domestic violence, remained a widespread problem.**

73. **In its resolution 61/143, the General Assembly highlighted violence against women as both a human rights violation and a constraint to development and called for accelerated efforts to eradicate such violence. In the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-first session, the Commission called for the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child. Enhanced efforts are needed to eliminate all forms of violence against Palestinian women and girls and to protect and promote their human rights, including through systematic and effective utilization of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.**

74. **Improving the situation of and enhancing the impact of assistance to Palestinian women is linked to the achievement of a secure and lasting peace. Renewed efforts need to be made by the international community to seek an end to the violent confrontations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Women should be fully involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives to be undertaken in the region, in**

accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

75. **United Nations entities should continue to operate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the refugee camps. Assistance focused on the empowerment of women, particularly in areas such as education, health, social welfare, employment and economic development, should be strengthened. Enhanced efforts should also be made to increase women's full participation in decision-making processes at all levels.**

76. **A gender perspective should be fully integrated into international assistance programmes, through, inter alia, gender analysis and the collection of sex-disaggregated data. All studies and reports undertaken by the United Nations on the situation of the Palestinian people should incorporate specific attention to gender perspectives. Governments, academic institutions, international organizations, and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, should be encouraged to collaborate on qualitative and quantitative action-oriented research on the situation of Palestinian women and girls.**

77. **Member States, entities of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders should intensify their efforts to provide financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women and systematically assess and report on the impact of those efforts.**